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## News Release

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# Mackerel Annual Adjustments Set for 1996-1997 Fishing Season

After reviewing the Annual Stock Assessment for Atlantic group king and Spanish mackerel, the council took advisory panel recommendations and voted to change the quotas for these species at the June meeting in Key West, Florida.

Each year the council submits recommended changes in total allowable catch (TAC), bag limits and trip limits through a seasonal framework, after reviewing the annual stock assessment report.

This year, the Stock Assessment Panel incorporated bycatch mortality of mackerels in the shrimp fishery, data not previously considered in Atlantic group mackerel assessments. This drove the allowable biological catch (ABC) range for Atlantic king mackerel down from 7.3-10.5 million pounds last year to 4.1-6.8 million pounds for 1996/1997. The ABC range for Atlantic Spanish mackerel dropped from 4.9-14.7 million pounds last year to 5-7 million pounds for 1996/1997.

The ABC range is the total number of fish which may be harvested in order to leave enough spawning stock to replenish the supply; thus the council looked within the new ABC range to set this year's TAC. Once the new quota is filled, the fishery will close until the start of the new fishing year.

### **KING MACKEREL**

Upon recommendation by the Mackerel

Advisory Panel, the council lowered the Atlantic migratory group king mackerel 1996/1997 TAC from 7.3 million pounds to 6 million pounds, which is toward the higher end of the ABC range. Allocation of the quota is 3.77 million pounds for the recreational sector and 2.23 million pounds for the commercial sector.

The bag limit will remain 3 from Georgia north to New York and 2 for Florida.

### **SPANISH MACKEREL**

For Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel, the council set 1996/1997 TAC at 7 million pounds, the highest possible within the ABC range. Allocation of the quota is evenly split, at 3.5 million pounds for each sector. The bag limit will remain 10 throughout the range, from Florida to New York.

The council voted to move the opening of the unlimited Spanish mackerel fishing season from December 1 to November 1, which will make the fish available earlier in the season. The council concluded that the quota will protect the species from any adverse impacts due to the new date. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, harvest will be unlimited. On other days, the trip limit is 1500 pounds per day. After 75% of the quota is taken, the trip limit will be 1500 pounds per day for all days.

*See Mackerel. page 2*

# Council to Take Recreational Sale Issue to Public Hearing

The South Atlantic Council voted at the June meeting in Key West to pursue the possibility of restricting the sale of fish harvested under legal bag limits in South Atlantic federal waters (from three to 200 miles offshore).

Fishermen from the commercial and recreational sectors provided the council with a variety of concerns both for and against the practice of allowing recreational anglers to sell their catch. Though attendance at scoping meetings concerning this issue was low, most of those who commented expressed interest in taking it to public hearing.

Currently, recreationally harvested fish may be sold in all four states in the council's jurisdiction to licensed wholesale seafood dealers, with the appropriate license (GA: commercial fishing license; SC: land and sell license; NC: vessel endorsement to sell license; and FL: saltwater products license). Federal and state regulations must be compatible because it will be impossible for law enforcement to determine where the fish were harvested.

Of the eight regional fishery management councils, the South Atlantic is one of three which currently allows the sale of recreationally caught fish. Two councils prohibit the sale, two have implemented restrictions in some fisheries, and one council has no regulations for the recreational sector.

Council staff is currently developing an options paper, which will include possible actions the public may comment on during public hearings, ranging from no action at all to completely prohibiting the sale of recreationally caught fish (all species) harvested from South Atlantic federal waters.

The council will revisit this issue at the November 18-22 meeting in Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, and may schedule public hearings at that time.

*mackerel Continued from page 1*

Council rationale for lowering TACs in a fishery deemed not overfished is that they are aiming to manage at the 40% spawning potential ratio level, which will ultimately produce higher yields and afford for higher TACs and trip limits. The council is currently managing at 30% spawning potential ratio, but Amendment 8 proposes to change the target to 40%.

These framework actions will be submitted in a regulatory amendment to the Secretary of Commerce for approval mid-July. King and Spanish mackerel caught from April 1, 1996 will count towards the commercial and recreational quotas for 1996/1997 upon approval of the amendment. Bag limits will not be changing.

In other business, the council voted to request the National Marine Fisheries Service do everything possible to monitor the effectiveness of bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) in the shrimp fishery, and determine the impacts of these devices on king and Spanish mackerel stocks. Due to recent budget cuts, the National Marine Fisheries Service indicated they could no longer support BRD research.

## **Council Continues Refining Options for Snapper Grouper Limited Entry**

The council continued refining options for Snapper Grouper Amendments 8 and 9 at the June meeting in Key West.

Amendment 8 proposes traditional management measures, such as size limits, gear restrictions, bag limits, closed seasons and trip limits to rebuild several species in the snapper grouper complex.

Amendment 9 proposes to limit effort in this fishery by reducing the number of vessels allowed to fish for snapper grouper species. Currently the size and capacity of fleets fishing for these species is significantly higher than the stocks can sustain on a long-term basis.

The council made several changes to both documents by adding and deleting options. Currently, the preferred alternative the council has taken for Amendment 9 is to limit permit holders to those who held valid snapper grouper permits for 1993, 1994, and 1995. Council deleted the logbook requirement from the preferred alternative after numerous fishermen reported that the logbook system contains many problems.

The council will revisit these issues at the August 19-23 meeting in Charleston, SC, and may approve the amendments for public hearing at that time.

# Council Seeking Advisory Panel Members

The South Atlantic Council has openings on a variety of advisory panels. Advisory panels help guide the council throughout the management process by providing first-hand, professional knowledge and advice concerning fisheries issues. Development of fisheries regulations are based, in part, on advisory panel input.

Advisory panels may meet once or twice a year, depending on the issues at hand. Attendance is required, and appointments are for three-year terms. Travel costs, including transportation, food and lodging, are reimbursed by the council.

If you are interested in serving on one of the following panels, please call the council office to request an application. These positions will be filled at our August 19-23 meeting.

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|--|--------------------|
| ⇒ Coral                                | ⇒ Red Drum         |
| ⇒ Spiny Lobster                        | ⇒ Flounder         |
| ⇒ Mackerel                             | ⇒ Law Enforcement  |
| ⇒ Shrimp                               | ⇒ *Snapper Grouper |
| ⇒ Habitat and Environmental Protection |                    |

**\*With regard to Snapper Grouper, we are particularly interested in applicants from the South Florida area, as well as recreational and charterboat fishermen from North Carolina.**

**R**ecognizing the broad interests of various user groups and sectors in marine fisheries management, we are expanding our advisory panel expertise to incorporate conservation, habitat and environmental input. For now we are concentrating on the Coral, Shrimp, Rock Shrimp, and Snapper Grouper Advisory Panels. Those interested in applying for one of these positions should call the council office at 803-571-4366.

**The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils, conserves and manages fish stocks from three to 200 miles off North and South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida shores.**



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